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ABSTRACT

Social dramatics is a therapeutic and educational program that can act as a mirror to reflect images of the self in action with others. It is the modality for experiential learning to correct social dysfunction by providing models for imitation, opportunities to practice and develop individual forms from that model, and risk free environments for a trial and error learning system as well as instructional guidance. As such it should be distinguished from psychodrama. Social dramatics is the role playing of human relations, with the avoidance of psychological areas, whereby each individual becomes aware of, and responsible for, his or her own social interactions. It is social interaction, social training--not psychotherapy. The absence of catharsis in a social dramatics interaction further separates it from psychodrama. In psychodrama the emotional catharsis is the purgating element that brings about insight. In social dramatics, no such emotional catharsis is ever approached, ever allowed to begin, because it is the intellectual understanding of the social ill that is paramount, and any emotional interruption will decrease the amount of learning taking place. Improvisation requires clear thinking, and the flow to catharsis must always be interrupted. Consequently, the director must always be on guard to interrupt the cathartic flow. Social dramatics is not entertainment. It can be dangerous, and the strength and control of the director is its only safety valve. (HOD)

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THE PSYCHODRAMA-SOCIAL DRAMATICS SEPARATION

Social dramatics is not a recreational activity in play acting, nor an entertainment oriented device, but it is a therapeutic and educational program which can act as a mirror to reflect images of the self in action with others. It is a socially therapeutic modality based loosely on the theory and practive of Jacob L. Moreno.

Study upon study has demonstrated the clear superiority of the action modality as a learning stimulus. Vance, McGee, and Finkle demonstrated that "experiential learning is more effective than passive listening,"[1] as if any proof were required of the fact that we learn more from experience than from a text. This obvious fact becomes most intriguing when one discovers that this kind of learning is not correlated with intelligence or the intelligence quotient, except perhaps in terms of the amount of time that is required for the learning process to reach fulfillment. This too, has been often verified. We know that "individuals are able to improve their behavior,

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and to attain superior performance skill without any significant change in the intelligence quotient."[2] Saftel has also clearly demonstrated that "deprived children do not learn readily from the printed word and from abstract principle; rather, they learn from concrete detail, from use of the senses, from touching, seeing, acting, making."[3] Social dramatics is the modality for experiential learning to correct social dysfunction by providing models for experiential learning to correct social dysfunction by providing models for imitation, opportunities to practice and develop individual forms from that model, and risk free environments for a trial and error learning system as well as instructional guidance. Moreno believed that "mental defectives," and social dramatics believes that social defectives, "who have come to the end of their learning ranges by means of devises which are constructed to meet the postulates of intelligence and memory functions are still able to learn by means of spontaneity training and role playing."[4] And this learning is vital to the success and acceptability of the individual on a day to day reality. This is, of course, most obvious in the area of mental retardation, yet true in a lesser degree for every individual. As mentally retarded individuals must react socially, always considering the consequences of their actions, so must the police officer, for example, enter an interaction with the same considered effectiveness, and so must we all.

The more one learns about psychodrama, the better prepared one will be to avoid it, and to direct and control the social dramatic experience. Whenever social dramatics will be considered for implementation as an educational training modality, there will be some difficulties because of the methodological ties which it has with psychodrama. Some misunder-

standings do not allow for a social dramatics -psychodrama separation. It must be understood that every implementation must make this separation clear to avoid conflicts and to assure good will and cooperation. Blatner defined psychodrama as "the method by which a person can be helped to explore the psychological dimensions of his problems through the enactment of his conflict situations, rather than by talking about them."[5]

The key to our separation is in the phrase, "explore the psychological dimensions." Social dramatics never questions the psychological dimentions of the objectives aimed at. If an area of psychological influence is discovered, the individual is referred to the proper professional. Blatner assists our separation from psychodrama when he defined Sociodrama as,

> ...a form of psychodramatic enactment which aims at clarifying group themes rather than focusing on the individuals problems. Although a person may participate as a protagonist in a sociodrama, the focus of the group task is on the problems of the role he plays in the drama rather than on his personal life situation.[6]

Social dramatics is not sociodrama according to this definition because although it does avoid psychological areas, it by no means avoids the "personal life situation" of the individual. It is closer to sociodrama, however, than to psychodrama, especially if one can accept Shaftels more simplified definition of the former as "role playing of human relations problems with the help of a critical, evaluating audience."[7] Social dramatics is the role playing of human relations, with the avoidance of psychological areas, whereby each individual becomes aware of, and responsible for, their own social interactions. Certainly, the private individuals can not be eliminated, but their external activities can be isolated. Social dramatics is an action centered group activity. It is social inter-

action, social training. It is not psychotherapy. Do not forget that the object of therapy is to "change dysfunctional interactional patterns between an individual and his context in order to increase the functional level," and that social dramatics is an excellent method to obtain that objective. social dramatics is, then, an action centered group activity which aims at dysfunctional interactional patterns of a social nature. This basic separation from psychodrama existed from the very origin of group therapy. As Jacob L. Moreno created psychodrama, and thereby created all of the group therapy modalities, as an independent therapeutic methodology, he simultaneously created sociodrama as an independent therapeutic methodology.

There is a further point of division between social dramatics and psychodrama, and it is vital to the health and well being of the director, the participants and the program itself. There can be no catharsis in a social dramatics interaction. This is in opposition to psychodrama as well as being contrary to the very nature of theatre itself. In psychodrama the emotional catharsis is the purgating element which brings about insight. The theory is that once the emotion frees itself from the confines of the intellectual self-defence mechanisms the purgation of emotional trauma through catharsis allows the client to free himself of the psychological difficulty. Moreno said,

> A psychodrama may in the climactic development of its action, bring about an explosive outburst, an emotional breakdown of the patient which may lead to the patients total recovery. The doctors speak then of immediate therapy; for the layman, however, such an outbreak of the demons which fill the soul is a miracle.

In social dramatics, no such emotional catharsis is ever approached,

ever allowed to begin, because it is the intellectual understanding of the social ill that is paramount, and any emotional interruption will decrease the amount of learning taking place. In this, it is closer to Brecht then to Moreno, for Brecht described a not-aristotilian theatre which paralleled the activities of social dramatics. He said,

> This /non-aristotelian drama/ makes nothing like such a free use as does the aristotelian of the passive empathy of the spectator; it also relates differently to certain psychological effects, such as catharsis. Just as it refrains from handing its hero over to the world as if it were his inescapable fate, so it would not dream of handing the spectator over to an inspiring theatrical experience. Anxious to teach the spectator a quite definite practical attitude, directed towards changing the world, it must begin by making him adopt in the theatre a quite different attitude from what he is used to.[9]

The psychodramatist, unlike the social dramatist, relies on the natural flow of the dramatic event to bring the client to a climactic moment when they are prepared to handle it and purges the emotional conflict through catharsis. The nature of the theatre is to explode at its conclusion, yet the social dramatist sees that as a complete emotional interference to the desired learning process and as a result, there is no smooth flow of action in a social dramatic enactment. As the emotional content of a social dramatics event increases, the intellectual perception decreases. Improvization requires clear thinking, and the flow to catharsis must always be interupted.

Social dramatics must reject the catharsis. Its methodology agrees fully with Shaftel, who described it as

> ...a group problem-solving method that enables...people to explore in spontaneous enactments followed by guided discussions - utilizing critical evaluation and full discussion in a supportive atmosphere - of how they tend to solve such problems, of what alternatives are available to them, and of what the personal and social consequences are of the proposals they offer.[10]

The director must always be prepared to interupt the drama's natural tendency to flow to a climactic moment; to empty itself in emotional catharsis and purgation. As mentioned, this emotional response, although automatically inherent in the dramatic event, is a direct interference to the intellectual recognition of problem solution, and in fact, quite dangerous if allowed complete freedom. The director must be always on guard to interrupt the flow and lead the performer in and out of the illusion in order to maintain intellectual dominance over the emotion.

Stop the scene. Interrupt it at the first spark of emotion and ask the performer questions about the event that require thought, and in that way extablish control. Do this as often as is necessary with no regard for the dramatic quality or entertainment value or aesthetic content of the scene. This point is crucial to the success of the individual and the program, for without extensive psychiatric training, emotional depths can be entered almost automatically as Moreno has demonstrated countless times. The director of social dramatics must avoid these dark regions of the soul and, at the risk of appearing shallow, restrict his actions to the controlling factors of the mind, disregarding the ever-present temptation to witness the agonies of an individual spirit. Control yourself and the emotional content of every interaction. Watch the flow, and interrupt it.

Social dramatics is not entertainment. It can be dangerous, and the strength and control of the director is its only safety valve. The director must be Brechtian and not Aristotelian, applying the Verfremdungs effekt to defeat the truths described by Aristotle.

NOTES

1. Vance, Hubert; Harold J. McGee; and Louis Finkle, "Group Counceling with Mentally Retarded Persons," Personnel and Guidance Journal, Nov-1977.

2. Moreno, J.L., Psychodrama, 1st Volume, p. 79.

3. Shaftel, Fannie R., Role Playing for Social Values: Decision-Making in the Social Studies, p. 156.

4. Moreno, p. 79.

5. Blatner, Howard, Acting-In: Practical Applications of Psychodramatic Methods, p. 6.

6. Blatner, p. 9.

7. Shaftel, p. 145.

8. Moreno, J.L., Psychodrama, 2nd Volume, p. 36.

9. Willett, John, Brecht on Theatre, p. 57.

10. Shaftel, p. 262.